



CHAP Designation FAQs

chap.baltimorecity.gov
caitlin.audette@baltimoreplanning.com
(410) 396-8354

The Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP) works with historic neighborhoods across Baltimore City to pursue local historic district designation. Designation helps to protect and celebrate a neighborhood's rich history. It also provides an effective and transparent design review process that preserves the neighborhood's historic character.

1. What is a Historical and Architectural Preservation Historic District?

A Historical and Architectural Preservation District, also known as a CHAP district or local historic district, is an area identified by City ordinance as having historical, cultural, educational, or architectural value and designated in accordance with the City ordinance.

2. What are the advantages of becoming a Historical and Architectural Preservation District?

The identification and protection of historic neighborhoods and landmarks promotes the unique history and culture of Baltimore for the benefit of its citizens, visitors, and investors. Historic designation can translate into cost savings through tax incentives and grants for preservation work, and direct reinvestment in the local economy. The goal of preservation is not to freeze properties in time, but manage change to positively impact the future of Baltimore. By ensuring that its citizens are good stewards of the City and its heritage, we are preserving the finest attributes of the City for the next generation.

Local designation fosters rehabilitation efforts within communities, provides eligibility for tax credits and other financial incentives, gives distinction to neighborhoods, provides protection from demolition and inappropriate development and alterations, and offers access to expert technical assistance from CHAP.

3. My neighborhood is already a National Register Historic District, isn't that enough?

National Register Historic Districts provide **no protection from demolition or inappropriate development by private property owners**, nor technical assistance and professional design review for alterations and new construction. The main benefit of a National Register designation is protection from federal and state funded projects (such as large highways), and the opportunity for property owners to use federal, state, and local historic rehabilitation tax credits.

4. What is the process for designation?

The Mayor and City Council designate Historical and Architectural Preservation Districts by ordinance upon the review and recommendation of CHAP and the Planning Commission. The three-step process

for designating a Historical and Architectural Preservation District is outlined below. More information can be found in the CHAP Rules & Regulations.

- a. **Step 1:** Assessment by CHAP to identify historic resources and potential district boundaries, survey of property owners to determine support or opposition, and public notification through the Neighborhood Association, City Councilperson(s), and postings.
- b. **Step 2:** Analysis of the information gathered in Step 1, including property owner support, potential boundaries, and historic significance. This analysis is presented at a public hearing of the Commission and the Commission determines if the designation process should move forward.
- c. **Step 3:** Designation of the district through a multi-step public hearing process. CHAP shall hold a second hearing to vote on the designation, as shall the Planning Commission. If both vote in support, the designation shall be sent to the City Council to be voted upon. All historic districts are created by City Council ordinance.

5. Do I have any say in whether my neighborhood is designated?

- a. Yes! Public input is part of the process. Property owners in the district were mailed information about a survey of interest. There will be multiple public hearings at which everyone is welcome to provide testimony in support or opposition. If you cannot attend the hearings, you can provide CHAP Staff with your written testimony in advance of the hearing.

6. Is it possible to "opt out" of the district?

- a. No. Historic District boundaries must be established by a finding of fact and are determined through historic research and professional fieldwork. Properties cannot be removed from the district without a finding of fact as outlined in Chapter 6 of the Baltimore City Code.

7. Will historic district designation prevent me from doing work on my property?

No; however, all work must meet the CHAP Historic Preservation Design Guidelines. Note that the guidelines have been updated in recent years to make them more flexible for property owners. Some important changes are outlined below;

- a. Lead Paint: CHAP can now allow for the removal of historic elements due to the presence of lead based paint. These items must test positive for lead; be accessible, friction, or impact surfaces; and must be replicated to match the historic element removed.
- b. Alternative Materials: CHAP can approve alternative materials that visually replicate the historic materials. Examples of alternative materials include aluminum clad wood windows, composite and fiberglass windows, faux slate, and PVC trim among others. All properties and products are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
- c. Artistic Expression: CHAP has adopted guidelines lines allow and encourage artistic expression. This can include unique features such as decorative metal work, murals, and other unique features. Typically CHAP will require that the work is reversible.

8. What is the process to request approval for work I want to complete?

- a. A property owner must file an Application for Authorization to Proceed with CHAP as part of the building permit process when proposing to alter a designated structure. CHAP will review the application to determine if the work meets the Design Guidelines.
- b. For minor projects that comply with the Design Guidelines, the Commission offers an expedited review process at the staff level. Minor work involves repair of existing historic building fabric, including painting and small-scale alterations that do not change the overall appearance and integrity of a structure. The Application for Authorization to Proceed with appropriate supporting documentation is reviewed at the staff level without a public hearing. If the work is limited to basic maintenance and repair such as repainting windows or doors or installing a new sewer line, staff review can be completed same-day, but will likely be completed within 48 hours. If the review is more complex, such as the replacement of existing windows staff will share that with the neighborhood Architectural Review Committee who have five days to provide CHAP staff with comments.
- c. For major projects, the Application for Authorization to Proceed with appropriate supporting documentation is submitted to staff but is reviewed at a public hearing by the full Commission. Major work includes more than routine maintenance and repair of existing historic fabric, which may change the character, appearance, and integrity of the structure. Substantial building alterations, demolitions, additions, and new construction are all considered major work. The full commission meets on the second Tuesday of each month and complete applications must be provided to staff at least 25 days prior to the hearing to allow for proper posting and notification. Typically major projects have two CHAP hearings, one for concept review and one for final review.

9. Do I have to restore my property to its original appearance?

- a. No. If a property complies with the Baltimore City building code, no improvements are mandated by the City. CHAP will review and approve work that takes place AFTER the designation occurs. New work would have to meet the CHAP Design Guidelines. The purpose of historic district designation is to retain as much of the historic character and material that remains, while allowing the property to be functional in the 21st century.

10. Will work on my house cost me more money or take more time?

- a. In Baltimore City, all construction requires a building permit. CHAP asks a permit applicant to fill out an Application for Authorization to Proceed and supply photographs, plans, and materials relevant to the projects. Most of these applications are reviewed and approved at the staff level and do not require a full Commission hearing. If the applicant submits a completed application and all necessary supplemental material, often an Authorization to Proceed can be issued within 48 hours of receipt. CHAP staff accepts most submissions by email. There is a minimal additional cost for the CHAP Authorization to Proceed, ranging from \$0-\$50.
- b. In some cases, materials required to meet the CHAP Design Guidelines may cost more than non-historic alternatives. However, the CHAP Design Guidelines encourage repair and reuse of existing historic material whenever possible, which is usually less expensive than any form of replacement. When replacement is necessary, the use of higher quality materials is often more cost-effective in the long term. Federal, State, and City historic tax credits can help

offset these costs and applicants can appeal to the Commission when the cost of appropriate replacement materials creates an economic hardship.

11. Does local historic district designation mean that I can't change the use of my building?

No. Local historic district designation does not regulate the use of a building. Use is controlled by Baltimore City zoning regulations. If a change in use requires exterior changes (like adding new doors or signage), the changes must be permissible under the CHAP Design Guidelines.

12. What types of work does CHAP Review? I heard CHAP only cares about the front of the house.

CHAP reviews all exterior changes to buildings within a local historic district. Work on designated structures that is not visible from the street still requires an Authorization to Proceed. Most work that is not visible from the street can be reviewed at the staff level and does not require full Commission hearing.

13. My property is not historic; will it be impacted by the district designation?

Yes. All exterior work in local historic districts is reviewed by CHAP. Work on buildings that are not historic (called "non-contributing") are reviewed by CHAP to ensure that the work will not have a negative impact on the historic character of the district. New buildings do not have to undertake work to look historic. Non-contributing buildings in historic districts are eligible for a 10% federal tax credit for rehabilitation.

14. Is new construction, additions, or demolition allowed in a Baltimore City Historic District?

Major projects like additions, new construction, and demolition are reviewed at CHAP Commission hearings. These public hearings allow the full commission to consider the impact of these major projects to the character of the district. In most cases, new construction and additions are allowed, as long as they meet the CHAP Design Guidelines. CHAP has very specific demolition procedures, which take into account the historic significance of the building to the district and what impact the demolition would have on the historic character of the district.

15. Will designation hurt my property value or my ability to sell my house?

No. Local historic district designation has a lasting economic impact that is as enduring as the more visible aesthetic impact. A study of Baltimore City's property values demonstrated higher and more consistent assessment and sale values in local historic districts than properties outside of local historic districts. This led to more stable neighborhoods, and more reliable investment for homeowners, regardless of the overall economic climate. A relatively low percentage of the total home sales may indicate that local historic districts have more stable, long-term home-ownership rates than properties not located within local historic districts.

A 2012 study by PlaceEconomics concluded that Baltimore City Historic Districts experienced significantly lower rates of population loss than the City as a whole. Higher sales prices indicate that people are willing to pay more to live in historic districts and that the houses hold their value even through an economic downturn. The study of the economic impact of historic district designation in Baltimore City confirmed what other studies nation-wide have demonstrated, that properties located within local historic districts provide increased value for the city as a whole, with higher property and sales values than the City average.

16. Will my taxes go up as a result of the designation?

Designation is not directly tied to property taxes. Tax Assessments rise if you make substantial improvements to your property that trigger an out-of-cycle assessment. Luckily, Baltimore City offers a historic tax credit for qualifying improvements to historic properties. Every three years each area of the City is reassessed for property tax purposes. At that time the assessor determines the value of properties according to the individual property and the surrounding neighborhood.